

JESUS COLORED GLASSES
Philippians 1:12-26

Keeping the Joy Alive Series
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Pastor Nathan J. Thompson

There is a story about the famous and legendary football coach John McKay. One time after USC suffered an embarrassing loss to a mediocre team he called his team together in the locker room. He told them, “Be assured that there are 800 million people in China who will never know that this game was played.”

That is what you would call keeping things in perspective. And that is also a reality when it comes to joy or to being joyful in our hearts. The way we look at life, the way we view the opportunities and challenges, usually determines whether we know joy. (Read Phil. 1:12-26)

Now to refresh your memory the Apostle Paul is in jail as he is writing to this beloved church at Philippi. In the midst of his chains and awful conditions Paul is looking at things in a different perspective. In fact, he has an overflowing and infectious joy even as he faces the three most common joy stealers—circumstances, people, and the unknown future.

So first of all Paul finds great joy despite his circumstances of imprisonment. Paul says, “*What has happened to me has actually served to advance the Gospel.*” (vs. 12) In the case of Paul it was not about him and his welfare—none of that really mattered to him.

Where he finds the greatest joy is in the Gospel being spread near and far. All the good things and all the bad things that happen to him serve a greater purpose. Paul is offering this truth that all circumstances are in God’s hands.

Paul says in Romans 8:28: “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.*” It is truly difficult, I know, when we are in the tough circumstances of life to see anything good and yet Paul gives a couple examples.

One example is that the palace guards have heard about Jesus because of his imprisonment. Since Paul was a Roman citizen he was given the right of being chained 24/7 to a palace guard member. This gave him a little more freedom than other prisoners.

So rather than thinking that this was terrible, like most prisoners did, Paul is happy about this because he can now tell these guards about Jesus. And after a few months Paul celebrates and finds joy in the fact that every guard has heard about Jesus.

Another example Paul gives is that many Christians have received encouragement because of his imprisonment. In fact, many learned from Paul how to deal with suffering; how to trust God and how God can bring good even in our weakest times. His life was an example to others.

If you study history you know that one of the times when the Christian church grew the fastest and strongest was after the death and persecution of many faithful Christians known as martyrs. As these people gave up their life for Jesus, shared their faith and passion in the face of trouble, the Gospel was spread to the whole world.

And that is also a reassurance for you and me. In the suffering, uncertainties and storms we face, these things have the potential of helping us grow in our faith in Jesus and in strengthening our witness to others. It depends on whether we see Jesus with Jesus colored glasses.

The 14th chapter of Matthew gives the account of one of the busiest days in Jesus' ministry. He feeds the 5000; hears that his good friend, John the Baptist, had been killed by Herod; and his disciples are stressed because of the crowds and ministry they are doing.

So Jesus tells them to get in a boat, cross the sea, and get away from the crowds. He, in turn, goes up on a mountain to pray. When the disciples are on the sea a storm comes up. They look everywhere for their Savior—are panicked not seeing him.

Perhaps you, my friend, are in a storm right now in your personal life. Perhaps your circumstances are overwhelming you or you are having doubts about your faith and your joy is lost. You too may be looking around to see Jesus in your storm.

In Matthew's account, Jesus comes walking to them on the water in the midst of the storm. Jesus then calms the storm with just a word. He saved his disciples from their fears and challenges. And the good news is that Jesus can also bring calm and faith to you.

Writer and pastor, Max Lucado, surmises that if you sat down with these disciples and asked them if they could go back in time and not face the storm most would say that they would rather go through this again. The reason is because it was through the storm that they saw their Savior.

And in Matthew 14:32 it says that the disciples worshipped Jesus—the first time mentioned that they did this as a group. Because they were saved the only response was to worship. And when you know Jesus' salvation, know his deliverance, you will also have joy in whatever you go through. And you too will want to truly worship him with joy and love.

The second reality is that Paul was able to find great joy despite the people; the people who treated him badly in prison; the people who said untrue and hurtful things about him; the people who spread lies and gossip that were plain wrong; the many who were major rivals and who were very jealous of him.

My friends it is so easy to get caught up with what other people say or think—I know that I often do. And how often do we allow other people to dictate what we say, or do, or feel about ourselves? Paul knew very well all those who were taking unfair verbal shots at him and were trying to make him suffer even worse. It is amazing the power of the tongue.

Yet Paul's response was, "Who cares?" As long as Jesus is proclaimed, then that's all that really matters. As long as the Gospel is preached God will take care of all the rest. Paul did not allow people to take away his joy.

My father used to tell the story of the pastor who would shake hands with the people at the door at the end of the service. One Sunday a woman told him, "Pastor that was a wonderful sermon." Trying to be humble the pastor said, "Oh, it wasn't me, it was the Holy Spirit," to which the woman responded, "No, it wasn't that good." As long as Jesus is preached God will take care of all the rest.

Now some of you may feel today like you are imprisoned by the people around you. You might fear individuals in your family, some friends or co-workers, because of your faith in Jesus. The good news is that you can rejoice that in Christ you can shine forth your faith and you can reflect his glory in all that you do.

The third reality is that Paul is able to find great joy even with his unknown future. He says in verse 20: "*Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" (Read verses 22-26)

In Paul's eyes the central reason for joy is that to live is Christ and to die is gain. I have a book on my shelf with the title, "*Either Way I Win.*" If I can live some more years, I win. If I die tomorrow, I win. Through faith and trust in Jesus you can have joy whatever the future may hold.

Perhaps you remember that scene from the old movie, "City Slickers." Jack Palance's character, Curly, says to Billy Crystal's character, that "*life is one thing.*" And that's what Paul is emphasizing. Life means Jesus Christ. Our entire existence, in life and death, depends on him.

How about you, my friend? Is Jesus that important to you? Do you know that Jesus is there for you in both life and in death? Simply ask Jesus to fill you with his love today. Ask him to empower and grow that kind of faith in you. Then you too will know his joy.

Martin Luther's great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress," says it so well in verse 4: "*God's word forever shall abide, No thanks to foes or fear it. For God himself fights by our side, With weapons of the Spirit. Were they to take our house, goods, honor, child or spouse, Though life be wrenched away, They cannot win the day. The kingdom's ours forever.*"

Paul's overwhelming joy, my friends, comes from the confidence that God can handle every circumstance; that he can stay focused on Jesus in spite of people working against him and that God has the unknown future in his hands. Paul believes and expects with all his heart God's deliverance in the end.

This is what it means to look at this world, along with every opportunity and challenge, through Jesus colored glasses. It means that you can live with the assurance that none of these things can ever change the end of the story. And that, my friend, is a cause for great joy!